

Message Text

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PAGE 01 NATO 06217 291709Z
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C O N F I D E N T I A L NATO 06217

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS:MPOL, NATO, UK
SUBJECT: UK CONTRIBUTION TO NATO: RETENTION OF 41
COMMANDO ROYAL MARINES

THERE FOLLOWS BELOW THE TEXT OF UK CHARGE HOLMER'S 28 JUNE
LETTER TO SYG LUNS CONCERNING RETENTION OF 41 COMMANDO
ROYAL MARINES. BEGIN TEXT:
UK CONTRIBUTION TO NATO: RETENTION OF 41 COMMANDO ROYAL
MARINES

1. IN HIS LETTER TO YOU DATED 21 JUNE ABOUT REDUCTIONS IN
UK DEFENSE EXPENDITURE FOR 1978/79, SIR JOHN KILICK
EMPHASIZED THAT THE MEASURES WE PROPOSED DID NOT MEAN ANY
REDUCTION IN FRONT-LINE FORCE LEVELS, AND SHOULD NOT AFFECT
OUR ABILITY TO ACHIEVE THE CURRENT NATO FORCE GOALS OR THE
READINESS STATES SHOWN IN OUR DPQ 76 TABLES. SIR JOHN
ALSO EXPLAINED, IN HIS LETTER AND IN SUBSEQUENT DISCUSSIONS,
THAT WE HAVE NOT LOST SIGHT OF THE CALL FOR FORCE IMPROVE-
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PAGE 02 NATO 06217 291709Z

MENTS BOTH IN THE SHORT-TERM AND AS PART OF THE LONG-TERM
DEFENSE PROGRAM. AS EVIDENCE OF THIS, I AM GLAD TO BE
ABLE TO TELL YOU NOW ABOUT A SIGNIFICANT FRON-LINE IMPROVE-
MENT WHICH WE HAVE MANAGED TO INCORPORATE IN OUR PLANS IN
SPITE OF THE REDUCTION IN THE UK DEFENSE BUDGET IN 1978/79:
THIS IS A DECISION TO KEEP IN BEING 41 COMMANDO ROYAL
MARINES.

2. THIS DECISION MEANS THAT WE WILL BE KEEPING FOUR ROYAL MARINE COMMANDOS INSTEAD OF THREE, AND 41 COMMANDO WILL BE OF DIRECT BENEFIT TO NATO IN TWO WAYS. FIRST, WE PLAN TO SEND THE COMMANDO ON REGULAR TOURS TO NORTHERN IRELAND, AND TO CONCENTRATE THE BENEFIT OF THIS ON BAOR, BY EXTENDING THE INTERVAL BETWEEN THE NORTHERN IRELAND TOURS CARRIED OUT BY UNITS FROM GERMANY. THESE MARINES ARE FLEXIBLE TROOPS, ALWAYS WELL RECRUITED AT A HIGH STANDARD, AND I AM SURE THAT THEY WILL PROVIDE A WELCOME BOOST TO OUR OPERATIONAL READINESS. SECOND, WE INTEND TO MAKE THE COMMANDO AVAILABLE TO NATO AND THE DETAILS CAN NOW BE DISCUSSED BETWEEN THE NATO MILITARY AUTHORITIES AND THE MINISTRY OF DEFENSE IN LONDON.

3. AN ANNOUNCEMENT ABOUT THE RETENTION OF 41 COMMANDO ROYAL MARINES IS BEING MADE IN PARLIAMENT TODAY.

4. I AM COPYING THIS LETTER TO ALL MEMBERS OF THE DPC AND ARRANGING FOR COPIES TO BE MADE AVAILABLE FOR INFORMATION TO THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVES OF FRANCE AND GREECE.
END TEXT. BENNETT

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